

**Security Council**

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United Nations Disengagement Observer Force**Report of the Secretary-General****I. Introduction**

1. The present report provides an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) for the period from 15 September 2018 to 20 November 2018, pursuant to the mandate set out in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended in subsequent Council resolutions, most recently resolution 2426 (2018).

II. Situation in the area of operations and activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

2. During the reporting period, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic was maintained notwithstanding a number of violations of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces (Disengagement of Forces Agreement) of 1974, which are set out below. Following the cessation of conflict and the regaining of control in August 2018 by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic of parts of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side that had previously been under the control of various non-State armed groups, the security situation in the UNDOF area of operation remained calm. There was a low level of military activity owing to controlled detonations of explosive ordnance as part of clearance of remnants of war conducted by Syrian security forces. UNDOF personnel also heard single shots from small arms in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side on a daily basis. As underscored again by the Security Council in its resolution 2426 (2018), there should be no military activity of any kind in the area of operations.

3. In employing its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and see that it is scrupulously observed, as prescribed in the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, UNDOF reports all breaches of the ceasefire line that it observes. All incidents of firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line, as well as the crossing of the ceasefire line by individuals, are violations of the Agreement. In its regular interaction with both sides, the leadership of UNDOF continued to call upon both parties to exercise restraint and prevent any miscalculation that might lead to an escalation of the situation.



4. During the reporting period, UNDOF observed an increase in the presence of Syrian armed forces in the area of separation. UNDOF observed the daily presence of military personnel, some of whom were armed, staffing a number of checkpoints within the area of separation, including in the vicinity of Ba'th and Khan Arnabah, as well as along the main road connecting Qunaytirah to Damascus. New checkpoints were established close to the Qunaytirah crossing and also in the southern parts of the area of separation. UNDOF also noted the occasional temporary presence of military police of the Russian Federation in the area of separation.

5. On 11 November, United Nations personnel at observation post 51 saw two Israel Defense Forces soldiers fire six shots from small arms and three smoke rounds into the area of separation in the direction of Qahtaniyah.

6. The military violations on the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan) included the presence of 155-mm artillery pieces within 10 km of the ceasefire line. In addition, missile carriers, which are considered unauthorized military equipment in the area of limitation pursuant to the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, were observed within the 25 km zone of the area of limitation.

7. UNDOF observed the daily crossing of the ceasefire line by unidentified individuals from the Bravo side. UNDOF assessed that these individuals were shepherds and farmers tending livestock in the surrounding area. The number of individuals crossing the ceasefire line in the southern part of the area of separation decreased after the Israel Defense Forces closed the hospital that previously had been providing humanitarian assistance to individuals from the Bravo side.

8. UNDOF protested to the parties all violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement that it had observed, including the crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians from the Bravo side, the presence of unauthorized equipment and personnel in the area of separation and the firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line.

9. During the reporting period, UNDOF did not observe any internally displaced persons or tents in the area of separation. UNDOF was still not in a position to facilitate humanitarian crossings between the two sides, including for students, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross. With the reopening on 15 October of the crossing point at Qunaytirah between the Alpha and Bravo sides, which was closed in August 2014 when the security situation in the UNDOF area of operation deteriorated, the Mission stands ready to facilitate such crossings with the agreement of the Israeli and Syrian authorities.

10. Sporadic heavy explosions and bursts of heavy machine gun and small arms fire persisted throughout the reporting period in the northern, central and southern parts of the UNDOF areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. On 3 August, UNDOF personnel in Camp Faouar heard approximately 10 bursts of small arms fire 1 km north-west of the Camp. One stray bullet pierced the ceiling of a prefabricated block in Camp Faouar and hit an UNDOF soldier in the knee, causing minor injury. Two more stray bullets were found in a parking area in the Camp. On 11 October, UNDOF personnel in Camp Faouar heard about 80 bursts of heavy machine gun and small arms fire 1 1/2 km south-west of the Camp. Around the same time, a stray bullet pierced the ceiling of a prefabricated block in the Camp, ricocheted and hit an UNDOF peacekeeper, injuring him lightly. UNDOF was not in a position to determine the target of the firing of the shots. Syrian armed forces conducted daily detonations of unexploded ordnance and other remnants of war in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. According to open sources, there were recent discoveries of substantial weapons caches left by various armed groups on the Bravo side. UNDOF was not in a position to confirm the presence of any armed groups or weapons caches.

11. Since its temporary relocation from a number of its positions in the area of separation in September 2014, and pending its full return to operations on the Bravo side, UNDOF continued to maintain visibility, albeit limited, of the area of separation and the ceasefire line from its positions on Mount Hermon, Camp Faouar, position 80, in the southern part of the area of separation, and position 22, on the Alpha side. UNDOF operations continued to be supported by the military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in Observer Group Golan, who are under the operational control of UNDOF and have maintained five fixed and three temporary observation posts along the ceasefire line, as well as four temporary observation posts on Mount Hermon. On 30 October, Observer Group Golan established temporary observation posts in the vicinity of vacated observation posts 56, 71 and 72. Observer Group Golan will not be deployed at observation posts in the area of separation on a permanent basis until such time as the security conditions permit, when adequate accommodation and appropriate force protection measures are in place. The focus of Observer Group Golan has been on continuous static observation and situational awareness.

12. Through Observer Group Golan, UNDOF continued to carry out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. Liaison officers from the Alpha side accompanied the inspection teams. Inspections in the area of limitation on the Bravo side were suspended because of the security situation and did not resume.

13. Engagement between UNDOF and the Israel Defense Forces continued, with a view to addressing restrictions on movement and access to United Nations positions in the area of separation and to reduce the delays and challenges experienced by United Nations personnel in crossing the technical fence to observation posts and positions. The Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNDOF continued to remind the parties of their obligation to scrupulously abide by the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground, and to extend all cooperation to UNDOF in the fulfilment of the tasks under its mandate.

14. UNDOF, in consultation with both parties, continued to review the situation in the area of separation in order to assess whether the conditions on the ground would permit the return to vacated positions in the area of separation.

15. Since the resumption of patrolling on the Bravo side in February 2018, UNDOF has conducted more than 80 operational patrols on routes in the northern and central parts of the areas of separation and limitation. In addition, UNDOF also carried out assessment visits to different parts of the area of separation. The UNDOF mechanized infantry company and force reserve company conducted route reconnaissance to observation posts 56, 71 and 72 and positions 10, 16, 32 and 80. It is envisaged that UNDOF will include protected patrols to positions 37 and 85, and observation posts 57 and 58, in the near future. Liaison officers of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic accompanied UNDOF personnel on all patrols and assessment visits.

16. On 12 and 13 September, UNDOF personnel conducted clearance of mines, unexploded ordnance and remnants of war from the area at the Bravo gate and the Charlie gate at the Qunaytirah crossing. The UNDOF force reserve company verified the clearance of the area to ensure that the conditions at the crossing were safe for the use of United Nations personnel. With the support of the parties, the Alpha, Bravo and Charlie gates at the crossing were reopened on 15 October. The crossing became functional for UNDOF operational activities between the two sides on 17 October. UNDOF deployed its military police to the Charlie gate, which is situated between the Alpha and the Bravo gates, as well as at the Alpha and Bravo gates, to liaise with the respective sides on UNDOF personnel crossings.

17. During the reporting period, UNDOF continued to make progress towards the limited return to Bravo side operations, in line with the phased UNDOF plan (see S/2018/867). Pursuant to phase 2 of the plan, UNDOF continued to develop the infrastructure of and improve the living conditions at Camp Faouar.

18. On 22 and 23 October, UNDOF conducted a search and clearance operation of United Nations position 32 in order to remove potential hazards such as explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance. The operation did not unearth any hazards at the position and verified that conditions there were safe for the operations of United Nations personnel. In addition, also on 23 October, a platoon of the UNDOF mechanized infantry company commenced a limited reoccupation of position 32 to support engineering work related to the refurbishment of the facilities and of the security infrastructure at the position.

19. UNDOF assessed that there was a significant threat to United Nations personnel in the UNDOF area of operation from unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and mines, and from the possible presence of "sleepers" of armed groups, including listed terrorist groups, particularly in the southern part of the area of separation. UNDOF continued to assess the security situation in the southern part of the area of separation and to ascertain the capabilities that would be appropriate for deployment in that area, conditions permitting. On 18 October and 15 November, UNDOF conducted route reconnaissance patrols to positions 80 and 85 through the area of separation. These routes were assessed to be viable and in sufficiently good condition for future use by UNDOF vehicles, in particular for heavy vehicles, thus providing the Mission with the capability to reinforce and sustain the positions from the area of separation.

20. In accordance with the provisions of Council resolution 2426 (2018) and the UNDOF operational concept, UNDOF continued its efforts to deploy appropriate technology to ensure the safety and security of UNDOF personnel and equipment. A surveillance trailer remained deployed on the Alpha side at Camp Ziouani and position 22, while another was maintained at Camp Faouar.

21. UNDOF continued to resupply its positions on Mount Hermon and at Camp Faouar from Damascus. UNDOF convoys between Damascus and the United Nations positions were conducted almost daily, using main supply route 7 and Salam highway, with an UNDOF security escort and accompanied by a liaison officer from the office of the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate. UNDOF continuously monitored the situation and took the necessary precautionary measures in planning and conducting its convoys. UNDOF continued to conduct and update its contingency planning for the reinforcement and evacuation of United Nations positions and observation posts on both the Alpha and Bravo sides, as well as in Damascus. UNDOF conducted regular rehearsals, exercises and training for identified contingencies. Risk mitigation measures, including force protection measures, continued to be developed at observation posts, positions and operational bases at Camp Ziouani and Camp Faouar.

22. In line with the comprehensive review of United Nations peacekeeping operations, an independent review of UNDOF was undertaken in September and October 2018. The independent review assessed the assumptions that underpin the mandate of the Mission prescribed by the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and its protocol, and the conditions for its successful implementation. The review considered opportunities for improved performance of the Mission as it continues to return gradually to full operations on the Bravo side. A number of conclusions were made in the review, with the key findings and recommendations outlined below.

23. The review team noted the importance of the liaison maintained by UNDOF with the Israel Defense Forces and the Syrian authorities on a regular basis and during times of crisis. In the absence of a formal mechanism to interact with both parties at

the same time, UNDOF played a crucial role in conveying messages between the two sides. That was seen to have contributed, on a number of occasions, to clarifying misunderstandings and de-escalating tensions between the parties. The team also found that it was important for UNDOF, in consultation with the parties, to explore opportunities to enhance liaison with them to ensure compliance with the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. The team recommended that the engagement of UNDOF with both parties should be strengthened to ensure that they abided fully by the terms of the Disengagement Agreement.

24. The review team found that, while there had been a reduction in tension between the parties in the UNDOF area of operation, the parties continued to violate the ceasefire outside the UNDOF area of operation and that UNDOF was limited in its ability to influence such developments. In that context, it was recommended that UNDOF should explore opportunities to engage further with the parties in an effort to build confidence and trust between them. In addition, the review recommended that the Security Council review and consider addressing the violations by the parties of the ceasefire outside the UNDOF area of operation, and that the Council and relevant Member States urge the parties to avoid misunderstandings and any breaches of the ceasefire.

25. Despite the improvement in the security situation in the UNDOF area of operation, the review noted that the possible presence of "sleeping cells" of armed groups, including listed terrorist groups, unexploded ordnance and remnants of war posed risk to UNDOF personnel. The review team saw the rapid change in the security situation in the area of separation as an opportunity for UNDOF to advance its plan to return gradually to the area in order to improve its visibility of the area of separation and the ceasefire line. It highlighted that the reopening of the crossing point at Qunaytirah, which subsequently occurred on 15 October (see para. 16), should be achieved in the shortest time possible to facilitate effective and efficient mandate implementation. In that regard, the review team found that the gradual return to full UNDOF operations would require additional capabilities, including new technology for observation, force protection, an upgraded vehicle fleet and significant reconstruction of select vacated UNDOF positions, as well as appropriate configuration of operational capacities and streamlined processes. In addition, it found that UNDOF would need to carry out a broad range of activities and, thus, had to identify and prioritize United Nations positions for its immediate return. That would be guided by the value of each position in terms of visibility of the area of separation and the ceasefire line, and the risk mitigation measures and resources required.

26. It was proposed that synergy between UNDOF and other United Nations entities in the region working on common goals should be enhanced and that the relationship between UNDOF and UNTSO regarding UNTSO military observers serving in Observer Group Golan be clarified further.

27. Noting the challenges that UNDOF had faced in July 2018, when internally displaced persons had sought assistance at UNDOF positions in the area of separation, the review team proposed that UNDOF and United Nations Headquarters seek arrangements with the parties and the United Nations country team in the event that similar situations arose in the future. The review team also recommended that UNDOF, in consultation with the parties, consider resuming the civil affairs activities it conducted before the security situation deteriorated in the UNDOF area of operation.

28. The Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, in coordination with the Department of Safety and Security, are evaluating the main

findings of the review to identify risks, opportunities and other implications, with a view to implementing the recommendations.

29. As at 8 November 2018, UNDOF comprised 983 troops, including 38 women. Troops were deployed from Bhutan (3), Czechia (3), Fiji (294), Ghana (12), India (194), Ireland (138), Nepal (337) and the Netherlands (2). In addition, 70 military observers from UNTSO Observer Group Golan, including 8 women, assisted UNDOF in carrying out its tasks.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

30. In its resolution 2426 (2018), the Security Council called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973). It decided to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a period of six months, until 31 December 2018, and requested the Secretary-General to report every 90 days on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement resolution 338 (1973). The search for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, in particular the efforts made at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), was addressed in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/73/322), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 72/15 on Jerusalem and 72/16 on the Syrian Golan.

31. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties. The Syrian conflict further reduces the prospects for their resumption and for progress towards peace between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. I look forward to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions.

IV. Financial aspects

32. The General Assembly, by its resolution 72/298 of 5 July 2018, appropriated the amount of \$60.3 million for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019.

33. As at 16 November 2018, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNDOF amounted to \$14.5 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$1,607.6 million.

34. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 31 July 2018, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 30 June 2018, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

V. Observations

35. I note the calm situation following the cessation of military activity of the Syrian armed forces and armed groups, and between various armed groups, including listed terrorist groups, in the UNDOF area of operation. Noting the presence of the Syrian armed forces in the area, I reiterate that there should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF. I urge all parties to the Syrian conflict to cease military actions throughout the country and to remove all military equipment and personnel from the area of separation.

36. The Israel Defense Forces should refrain from firing across the ceasefire line. The continued presence of unauthorized weapons and equipment in the area of limitation on the Alpha side is of concern.

37. It remains critical that the parties maintain their liaison with UNDOF to prevent any escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line. All violations of the ceasefire line increase tensions between the signatories to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and undermine progress towards stability in the area.

38. I note the support of the parties in the re-opening of the Qunaytirah crossing to facilitate the operations of UNDOF. It is important that the parties provide all necessary support to allow full utilization of the crossing by UNDOF in line with established procedures. It is critical that UNDOF carry out its operations without facing any administrative obstacles. This is even more important as UNDOF increases its operations on the Bravo side to facilitate effective and efficient mandate implementation.

39. As UNDOF continues to consolidate its presence at Camp Faouar and maintains its efforts to intensify its operations in the area of separation, it remains critical that the safety and security of United Nations personnel be assured. The circumstances under which the troops and military observers are operating continue to require vigilance and risk mitigation measures. I renew my call upon the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to continue to fulfil its primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the Bravo side.

40. The implementation of the recommendations of the independent review of UNDOF will contribute to the efforts of the Mission to carry out its mandate in an efficient and effective manner as it continues to return gradually to full operations in the area of separation. The continued commitment of both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and support for the presence of UNDOF remains essential. The full return of UNDOF to the area of separation continues to be a priority for the Mission, conditions permitting. I count on the continued cooperation of both parties to facilitate the advancement of the Mission's plans for an incremental return to operations and positions in the area of separation and to ensure that the Mission can implement its mandate. It is critical that UNDOF be able to deploy the technology and equipment necessary to enhance its observation of the area of separation and the ceasefire line and to augment force protection. In that regard, the support and cooperation of both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic in ensuring that the deployment of the necessary technology and equipment occurs seamlessly and expeditiously are essential. At the same time, the parties must continue to support the enhancement of the liaison function of UNDOF.

41. It is equally important that the Security Council continue to bring to bear its influence on the parties concerned to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate in a safe and secure manner and is allowed to operate freely in accordance with the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. The support of the parties in facilitating the clearance of mines, unexploded ordnance and remnants of war in the UNDOF area of operation is crucial. It is also necessary for UNDOF to continue to have at its disposal all means and resources necessary for it to return fully to the area of separation, conditions permitting.

42. The confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries in UNDOF remain key factors in the Mission's ability to carry out its mandate. I continue to count on the support of troop-contributing countries as UNDOF proceeds with the implementation of its agreed plan to increase operations in the area of separation. I am grateful to the Governments of Bhutan, Czechia, Fiji, Ghana, India, Ireland, Nepal and the Netherlands for their contributions, commitment, resolve and consummate

professionalism. I am also thankful to the Member States that have contributed military observers to UNTSO.

43. I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area to be essential, and all the more so under the prevailing circumstances. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for a further period of six months, until 30 June 2019. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel also has expressed its agreement.

44. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Francis Vib-Sanziri, and the military and civilian personnel serving under his leadership, who continue to perform the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council with efficiency and commitment under challenging circumstances.

